

Eventually, the Celtic Church consisted of a network of monasteries that preserved learning and spread the Christian faith. However, their isolation from the church's central government eventually led to conflict between the Celtic Church and the Roman Church.

THE UNIFICATION OF SCOTLAND

In the 8th century, Viking raiders attacked coastal monasteries and villages. As the invaders penetrated into the interior of the country, some tribes were destroyed. Others found strength in unity. When Kenneth Mac Alpine became king of the Scots in 841, the neighboring Picts had suffered heavy losses from Danish pirates. Kenneth seized the opportunity to conquer them; in 844, he became the first king to rule both the Scots and the Picts.

Kenneth's successors continued to govern a unified kingdom. They tried to extend their borders to the southwest by conquering Edinburgh. But the most significant expansion of Scottish territory came when Malcolm II conquered the Angles living in Lothian in 1018. His attempts to extend his rule to the north met with less success, because many northern clan leaders resisted his authority.

MACBETH'S PLACE IN HISTORY

Malcolm II, like most early Scottish kings, killed his predecessor. Malcolm was succeeded by his grandson, Duncan, whose rule lasted only six years. Duncan's right to the throne was disputed by many, including Macbeth. When Duncan's army marched north of the River Spey, he entered Moray lands. Macbeth, who was Earl of Moray, joined Thorfinn of Orkney in a fierce battle against Duncan. Macbeth killed Duncan near Elgin, then marched south to Scone where he was crowned.

What impact did Macbeth have on Scottish history?

- His contemporaries saw him as a successful rebel rather than a usurper. Macbeth received the crown from his



peers, and his people prospered under his rule. As St. Berchan described his rule, "There was abundance in Alba east and west/Under the reign of the fierce Red One."

- Macbeth ended the conflict between the Scottish Church and the Pope. He and his wife generously supported monasteries, and Macbeth even made a pilgrimage to Rome.
- Macbeth honored Celtic tradition and resisted English influence. He was crowned at Scone and buried at Iona. His successor, who was educated in England and sought military alliances with the English, moved his palace and burial place to Dunfermline. Malcolm III replaced the old ways with the new Anglo-Norman culture. Eventually, his successors thought of themselves as more French than Celt, and his kingdom became part of Great Britain.



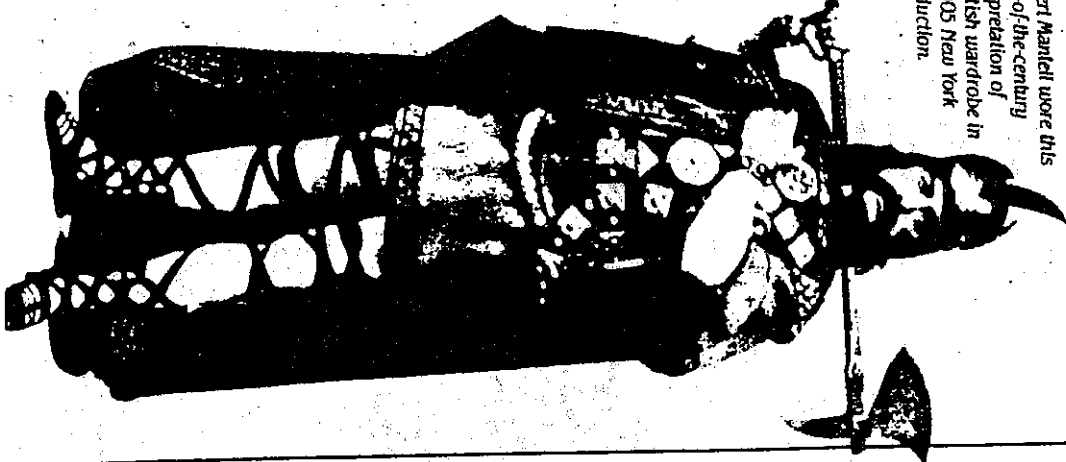
Ornament from a Celtic illuminated manuscript

Student 3 Handout

MACBETH

HOLINSHED, AND HISTORY

Port Mantell wore this interpretation of British wardrobe in 1905 New York production.



Inspired by an unholy trio of witches and driven by the insatiable ambition of his wife, William Shakespeare's Macbeth brutally murders an old and gentle king to seize the throne of Scotland. From that moment, this "man of blood," as he calls himself, embraces evil at every opportunity. He orders the murder of his friend Banquo and slays the helpless wife and children of Macduff. His rule is precarious, violent, and short, ending when he is beheaded by the bereaved Macduff and the throne is assumed by Malcolm, the son of the king Macbeth murdered.

Thanks to Shakespeare's artistry, Macbeth is one of the best-known characters in drama. He is almost certainly the most famous king ever to rule Scotland.

The problem with the story as Shakespeare tells it is that much of it simply isn't true. Who, then, was the historical Macbeth? What were the facts of his reign? And why did Shakespeare change history as he did?

The "real" Macbeth ascended the throne of Scotland in 1040, having defeated King Duncan in battle. The historic Duncan was not the wise, venerable, silver-haired aristocrat of Shakespeare's play—he was young, arrogant, and weak. Furthermore, he had violated the Scottish laws of succession by failing to consult with the "Thanes," or lords, before naming his son, a mere child named Malcolm, to rule after him. Macbeth and many other Thanes were enraged by this action.

Macbeth's wife, so important in the play, is barely mentioned in Holinshed's *Chronicles*, the book that served as Shakespeare's main source for this play and for many of his history plays as well. In fact, Shakespeare took the model for Lady Macbeth from another of Holinshed's stories altogether. Holinshed's picture of Bonquo also differs from Shakespeare's. The noble character who is murdered by Macbeth's hired assassins in the play is presented in the *Chronicles* as having conspired with Macbeth in the death of Duncan.

Finally, the historical Macbeth ruled Scotland not briefly, but for 17 years. He was

apparently a capable and wise monarch who felt secure enough on his throne to make a pilgrimage to Rome, where, according to one historical account, he scattered his money like seed to the poor. Even though he was defeated in battle by Malcolm in 1054, he continued to rule until his death three years later. He was then succeeded by his stepson, who ruled for a few months before Malcolm killed him and assumed the throne.

Some of Shakespeare's changes were undoubtedly made for dramatic effect—for example, the character of Lady Macbeth and the appearance of Bonquo's ghost at the banquet. Other changes were made in order

History

Macbeth fights in two wars—one with Norway and one against Scottish rebels.

Duncan is killed after being defeated in battle.

Duncan is young and weak.

Banquo conspires in Duncan's death.

Lady Macbeth plays little part in Macbeth's rise and fall.

Lady Macbeth's death is unrecorded.

Macbeth reigns 17 years and survives his defeat by Malcolm.



to please England's new king. When Queen Elizabeth I died in 1603, James VI of Scotland succeeded to the English throne as James I, and the crown passed to James's family, the Stuarts. The Stuarts claimed Banquo as the ancestor, which is why the witches show Macbeth a long line of Stuart kings. It would have been tactless (and dangerous) to Shakespeare to present the royal forefather as a crony and co-conspirator of Macbeth.

Look at the chart below. Which changes would you say were made by Shakespeare for political reasons and which for dramatic reasons?

Shakespeare

The two wars are combined into one.

Duncan is murdered in his sleep.

Duncan is old, wise, and gentle.

Banquo, innocent of Duncan's murder, is himself murdered by Macbeth.

Lady Macbeth is her husband's partner in evil.

Lady Macbeth takes her own life.

Macbeth is killed in battle by Macduff, and Malcolm assumes the throne.

The overall effect of many of these changes is to make Macbeth more evil. How do you think such changes serve Shakespeare's dramatic and political purposes?

(Left) Macbeth as tribal chieftain: Randle Ayrton in the title role; and Dorothy Massingham as Lady Macbeth in 1931.

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Student 5 Handout

"BY THE PRICKING OF MY THUMBS":

WITCHCRAFT IN

MACBETH

The witches as they appeared in director George C. Scott's 1960 film.



"Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live," says the Book of Exodus in the King James Version of the Bible, and those words were taken literally throughout Great Britain at the time that William Shakespeare wrote *MACBETH*. In fact, historians estimate that between 4,500 and 8,000 women were burned as witches in the hundred-year period between 1560 and 1660. Colonial America's infamous witch trials occurred shortly thereafter.

Modern audiences, watching a production of *MACBETH*, are often puzzled by the three witches. In Shakespeare's time, however, playgoers knew precisely what to make of them: they were witches. Accusations against women suspected of practicing witchcraft were common throughout Britain of the time, and nowhere were they more numerous than in Scotland, whose King James VI, became King James I of England when he assumed the British throne after the death of Queen Elizabeth I in 1603.

Royal Witch-Hunter

In a sense King James was himself the nation's leading witch-hunter. An incident when he was a young man gave him a horror of witches that he never overcame: upon his return from a voyage to Norway to claim his bride, Princess Anne, several women were arrested and charged with having used witchcraft to try to sink the king's ship.

James personally conducted the preliminary hearings, at which the women proudly revealed that they had sailed the ocean in slaves to do mischief to the vessel. When this improbable story was greeted with doubt, one of the women took the king aside and told him, word for word, what he had said to Princess Anne on their marriage night. This ill-advised display of divination (or intuition) cost the women their lives. In fact, when the jury found one of them innocent, the frightened and furious King forced the jurors to reconsider and burn her along with the others.

Almost immediately thereafter, the king went to work on a book that was to become the "Bible" of witch-hunters for the next hundred years. Called *Demonologie* (1597), this work described the evil that witches do, listed methods for recognizing them, and offered prescriptions for defeating their spells.

The book helped to create a wave of persecution against so-called witches throughout Scotland. For a time, boxes were placed under church-seats specifically to receive anonymous accusations against women. The

women so accused, usually guilty of nothing more than an unpleasant expression or a sharp word directed at the wrong person, were denounced from the pulpits of their own churches, and their neighbors were forbidden to offer them comfort or even food. Many of these unfortunate—illiterate, frightened, and unable to defend themselves against their sophisticated inquisitors, or to withstand torture—confessed and died in agony of the stick.

Powers of Witches

What fearful powers were these women suspected of possessing?

During the years of persecution, witches were accused of everything from souring milk to killing cattle. They were also blamed for bad crops and bad weather. But they were most feared for their power to lead a man-or-woman into evil deeds, thus delivering the souls of their victims to the devil. This is precisely what they do in *MACBETH*.

Witches, however, had no actual power over the human soul. They could persuade a person to commit evil acts, but the victim always maintained freedom of choice. Although they were the servants of the "father of lies," as the devil was called, witches could also use truth to achieve their purposes. They do so in *MACBETH*, when they predict that Macbeth will become Thane (lord) of Cowdor, and then King of Scotland, but they mislead him later by telling him apparently welcome truths that—when they ultimately prove false—bring about Macbeth's downfall. Banquo predicts exactly what will happen to Macbeth in Act I, Scene 3, when he says:

*And oftentimes, to win us to our harm,
The instruments of darkness tell us
truths,
Win us with honest trifles, to betray's
In deepest consequence...*

Shakespeare and the King

There is little question that Shakespeare took some pains to make *MACBETH* appealing to James I. The glorification of Banquo and the



Michael Redgrave as Macbeth in 1947.

long parade of his royal descendants shown to Macbeth by the witches make that clear. The play's preoccupation with witches clearly reflects another of Shakespeare's responses to the interests of his King. In Holinshed's *Chronicles*, Shakespeare's main source for the play, the apparitions on the heath are referred to only as the "weird sisters." The first stage direction in Shakespeare's play, however, reads: "Thunder and lightning. Enter three witches. One of them even sails to sea in a sieve, the exact vessel specified by the women who claimed they tried to sink James's ship.

Nor are the witches the only spirits in the play. Lady Macbeth summons up evil entities, "murdering ministers," to give her strength to persuade Macbeth to kill Duncan. Banquo's ghost makes its unwelcome appearance at the banquet. And even Macduff—although his birth can be explained without recourse to the supernatural—is not a "man of woman born." Morality plays, which were still being performed in England during Shakespeare's time often concerned themselves with the struggle between angels and devils for the possession of a man's soul. *MACBETH* brings that theme to new life as a great tragedy that is also a horror story designed to please—and terrify—a king.

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